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The World's Women: A Profile

prepared by

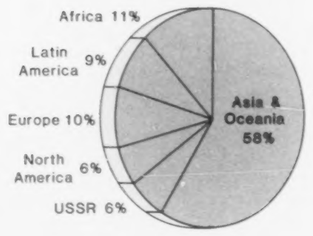
the Population Reference Bureau, Inc.

in recognition of the

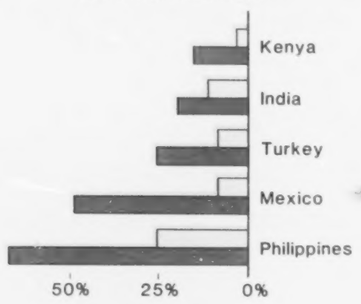
United Nations Decade for Women, 1976-1985

Over one half of the world's 2.4 billion women are Asian; another 20 percent live in the less developed countries of Africa and Latin America. Globally, nearly fifty percent of all women are of childbearing age and will probably have a total of 3 to 4 children. Thus, whatever additional roles women assume, that of motherhood remains the most basic throughout the world.

World's Women, 1985



Improving Secondary School Enrollments For Girls, 1960–1980



Education is probably the single most important factor in the enhancement of women's status. It has a positive impact on health, the ability to control the number and spacing of children and access to paid employment. School enrollment rates for girls have quadrupled in many countries just since 1960, yet they still lag behind boys' rates in Asia and Africa. In the developing countries, less than one-third of the girls attend secondary school.

Much of women's work goes unpaid and unreported in official statistics and cultural differences account for much of the variation in labor force participation rates among countries. Underreporting is especially common in agriculture, still a major occupation for women in Africa and parts of Asia, yet, one half of the food in developing countries is produced by women.

The ratio of female workers has improved at a rapid rate since World War II. The entrance of more women into the paid labor force has been facilitated by the growth of jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors, a result of economic development.

Region or Country	Number of Women, 1985 (millions)	Women of Childbearing Age, Ages 15-49, 1985 (millions)	Women of Childbearing Age, Ages 15-49, 2020 (millions)	Total Fertility Rate	% Women Using Contraception, Total/Modern Method	% Women Married, Ages 15-19	% Enrolled in Secondary School, Males/Females	% Adults Literate, Males/Females	% Women in Labor Force, Ages 15-64	Women in National Legislatures, % of Total Members
WORLD	2,412	1,193	1,947	3.6	49/–	23	47/36	71/56	47	14
MORE DEVELOPED	605	296	298	2.0	–	6	85/87	98/97	59	15
LESS DEVELOPED	1,808	897	1,649	4.2	44/–	27	41/28	65/43	43	13
LESS DEV. (Excl. China)	1,297	625	1,331	5.0	32/–	38	37/26	60/40	38	–
AFRICA	278	124	361	6.3	–	–	26/16	49/28	44	–
NORTHERN AFRICA	63	29	75	6.0	22/19	21	43/31	49/22	8	–
Algeria	11.1	4.9	14.7	7.0	–	–	42/29	57/32	4	4
Egypt	23.8	11.2	24.3	5.3	24/23	22	62/46	54/22	6	8
Libya	1.9	0.8	3.0	7.2	–	30	–	61/15	5	–
Morocco	12.1	5.4	15.7	5.9	26/21	22	33/22	34/10	14	–
Sudan	10.9	4.9	13.5	6.6	5/4	22	20/15	44/20	12	–
Tunisia	3.6	1.7	3.4	4.9	41/33	5	39/25	61/32	7	5
WESTERN AFRICA	84	37	113	6.4	6/1	42	–	40/19	52	–
Benin	2.0	0.9	2.7	7.0	20/1	44	30/12	40/17	39	0
Burkina Faso	3.5	1.6	4.4	6.5	–	54	4/2	15/3	81	–
Cape Verde	0.2	0.1	0.1	4.5	–	–	–	–	–	–
Gambia	0.4	0.2	0.4	6.4	–	–	22/10	29/12	71	–
Ghana	7.2	3.2	9.9	6.5	10/6	31	42/26	43/18	56	–
Guinea	3.1	1.4	3.6	6.2	–	–	23/9	40/17	59	3
Guinea-Bissau	0.5	0.2	0.5	5.4	–	–	23/6	–	3	–
Ivory Coast	4.9	2.2	7.5	6.7	2/0	56	28/11	45/24	75	5
Liberia	1.1	0.5	1.8	6.7	–	42	29/11	30/12	39	–
Mali	4.0	1.8	5.0	6.7	–	–	13/5	14/6	17	1
Mauritania	1.0	0.4	1.3	6.9	1/0	61	16/4	–	4	–
Niger	3.3	1.4	4.6	7.1	–	–	5/2	14/6	11	–
Nigeria	46.1	19.9	63.2	6.3	5/1	40	–	46/23	53	–
Senegal	3.4	1.5	4.4	7.1	4/1	59	16/8	37/19	63	11
Sierra Leone	1.8	0.9	1.8	6.1	–	–	15/7	38/21	43	–
Togo	1.5	0.7	2.0	6.1	–	–	41/14	27/7	54	8
EASTERN AFRICA	80	35	112	6.8	–	–	14/8	47/28	62	–
Burundi	2.4	1.1	2.8	6.4	–	–	4/2	39/15	95	9
Comoros	0.2	0.1	0.3	6.3	–	–	33/17	–	–	–
Djibouti	0.1	0.1	0.2	6.8	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ethiopia	18.1	8.1	21.8	6.7	–	61	16/8	8/1	60	–
Kenya	10.1	4.2	17.2	8.0	7/4	28	24/16	60/35	44	2
Madagascar	5.0	2.3	6.5	6.4	–	34	13/10	74/62	74	–
Malawi	3.6	1.6	5.1	6.9	–	51	5/2	52/31	54	13
Mauritius	0.5	0.3	0.4	2.7	50/32	13	53/49	86/72	25	6
Mozambique	7.0	3.1	9.2	6.1	–	–	9/4	37/14	87	–
Reunion	0.3	0.2	0.2	2.6	–	8	–	–	40	–
Rwanda	3.2	1.3	5.0	7.3	–	–	3/2	61/39	94	13
Seychelles	0.03	0.02	0.02	4.1	–	–	–	56/60	41	–
Somalia	3.7	1.6	3.5	6.5	1/–	–	16/6	11/3	37	–
Tanzania	11.0	4.7	17.3	7.1	–	19	4/2	62/31	84	–
Uganda	7.3	3.2	11.2	6.9	–	50	11/5	65/41	46	1
Zambia	3.4	1.5	5.0	6.8	–	–	22/12	84/67	41	3
Zimbabwe	4.3	1.9	6.8	6.6	39/27	–	27/19	77/61	36	8
MIDDLE AFRICA	31	14	40	6.1	–	–	28/11	55/28	49	–
Angola	4.0	1.8	5.0	6.4	–	–	–	48/30	9	–
Cameroon	4.9	2.2	5.9	6.5	3/1	53	25/13	–	49	14
Central African Republic	1.4	0.6	1.6	5.9	–	–	21/7	48/19	83	–
Chad	2.7	1.2	3.1	5.9	–	–	6/1	40/11	28	–
Congo	0.9	0.4	1.1	6.0	–	–	–	77/55	43	–
Equatorial Guinea	0.1	0.1	0.2	5.7	–	–	18/4	–	4	–
Gabon	0.5	0.2	0.6	4.7	–	–	–	70/53	54	–
Sao Tome and Principe	0.04	0.02	0.04	5.4	–	–	–	73/42	40	–
Zaire	16.8	7.5	22.7	6.1	–	–	33/13	74/37	60	–
SOUTHERN AFRICA	19	9	21	5.2	49/37	–	23/28	80/81	47	1
Botswana	0.6	0.2	0.9	6.6	28/19	8	21/25	37/44	39	5
Lesotho	0.8	0.4	0.9	5.8	5/2	31	16/24	62/84	72	–
Namibia	0.6	0.3	0.7	5.9	–	–	–	–	–	–
South Africa	16.4	7.7	18.2	5.1	50/37	–	–	85/85	46	1
Swaziland	0.3	0.1	0.5	6.5	–	–	43/41	57/54	71	–
ASIA	1,386	703	1,117	3.7	48/42	26	44/29	56/43	46	13
ASIA (Excl. China)	875	432	799	4.6	34/24	40	42/28	59/38	40	7
SOUTHWEST ASIA	55	26	65	5.9	29/13	26	52/33	69/42	27	3
Bahrain	0.2	0.1	0.2	4.6	–	–	61/54	83/74	19	–
Cyprus	0.3	0.2	0.2	2.5	–	5	–	85/97	46	3
Iraq	7.6	3.4	10.5	6.7	14/12	33	70/39	75/41	4	6
Israel	2.1	1.0	1.0	3.1	–	7	71/81	93/83	41	8
Jordan	1.8	0.8	3.1	6.6	26/21	19	79/76	80/51	7	0
Kuwait	0.8	0.4	1.2	6.2	–	29	81/72	73/59	21	0
Lebanon	1.3	0.7	1.3	3.8	53/29	–	57/59	79/58	18	–
Oman	0.6	0.3	0.8	7.1	–	–	30/12	–	–	–
Qatar	0.1	0.04	0.2	6.8	–	–	69/80	51/51	–	–
Saudi Arabia	5.1	2.2	7.8	7.2	–	–	38/25	35/12	5	–
Syria	5.2	2.2	7.9	7.3	20/15	23	62/40	60/20	10	–
Turkey	25.3	12.3	24.9	5.1	38/13	22	50/27	83/53	45	3
United Arab Emirates	0.4	0.2	0.6	5.9	–	56	64/70	58/38	–	–
Yemen, North	3.2	1.5	3.8	8.1	1/1	61	12/2	18/2	4	0
Yemen, South	1.1	0.5	1.4	6.9	–	–	24/11	48/8	5	1
MIDDLE SOUTH ASIA	511	251	481	5.0	30/23	54	36/18	46/19	36	7
Afghanistan	7.2	3.4	9.0	6.9	2/2	54	18/5	33/6	21	–
Bangladesh	49.2	22.0	55.3	6.4	19/11	70	24/6	37/13	12	–
Bhutan	0.7	0.3	0.7	5.5	–	–	5/1	–	–	–
India	367.8	185.4	324.6	4.5	35/28	57	39/20	48/19	44	7
Iran	22.1	10.4	24.3	5.6	–	34	48/32	48/24	14	–
Maldives	0.1	0.04	0.1	6.5	–	57	–	83/82	63	–
Nepal	8.3	3.7	8.7	6.3	7/7	59	32/9	33/5	46	5
Pakistan	47.7	22.1	51.7	6.4	5/4	31	20/8	36/15	12	–
Sri Lanka	8.1	4.2	6.5	3.7	55/30	10	52/57	91/81	29	3
SOUTHEAST ASIA	203	100	193	4.4	–	23	41/35	80/66	48	9
Brunei	0.1	0.05	0.1	4.4	–	13	–	85/69	33	–
Burma	18.5	8.6	23.2	5.3	–	22	22/18	76/56	46	–
Democratic Kampuchea	3.1	1.8	2.7	4.7	–	–	24/11	–	–	–
Indonesia	84.6	42.0	79.5	4.4	27/23	30	38/27	78/58	33	9
Laos	1.9	0.9	2.0	6.0	–	–	22/14	51/36	71	–
Malaysia	7.8	3.0	6.8	4.0	33/23	11	50/49	69/47	41	5

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Philippines	28.1	14.3	26.8	4.8	36/16	14	62/67	84/81	52	4
Singapore	1.3	0.8	0.7	1.7	–/71	2	65/66	92/74	47	0
Thailand	26.2	13.6	22.2	3.5	56/54	16	30/28	92/84	73	3
Vietnam	31.1	14.8	28.2	4.7	–	–	53/43	91/78	63	22
EAST ASIA	616	326	379	2.1	67/65	4	54/38	79/55	55	19
China	510.5	271.6	318.1	2.1	69/66	4	49/32	79/51	55	21
Hong Kong	2.6	1.4	1.6	2.0	72/63	3	64/70	90/64	53	–
Japan	61.3	31.0	27.1	1.8	57/–	1	92/93	99/99	54	3
Korea, North	10.1	5.0	9.5	4.0	–	–	–	–	69	20
Korea, South	21.2	11.6	14.4	2.6	58/48	2	94/85	94/81	45	3
Macao	0.2	0.1	0.1	3.8	–	–	–	85/74	–	–
Mongolia	0.9	0.5	1.0	4.8	–	–	82/90	95/90	43	23
NORTH AMERICA	135	69	72	1.8	69/63	8	94/96	99/99	60	5
Canada	12.8	6.8	7.2	1.7	74/71	4	96/95	99/99	59	6
United States	122.5	62.6	64.8	1.8	68/62	8	94/96	99/99	60	5
LATIN AMERICA	203	100	195	4.1	47/–	18	42/44	81/77	30	–
MIDDLE AMERICA	52	25	56	4.7	45/40	20	47/45	83/78	29	29
Belize	0.1	0.04	0.1	4.5	–	–	–	91/91	24	–
Costa Rica	1.3	0.7	1.2	3.5	65/57	15	44/51	89/88	28	7
El Salvador	2.5	1.1	3.2	5.6	34/32	–	19/21	66/59	43	10
Guatemala	3.9	1.8	5.0	6.1	25/21	28	16/15	54/39	14	–
Honduras	2.2	1.0	3.1	6.5	27/24	30	28/36	59/55	19	7
Mexico	39.8	18.9	40.4	4.4	48/42	19	54/49	89/84	31	33
Nicaragua	1.5	0.7	2.0	5.9	–	–	38/45	58/57	25	–
Panama	1.0	0.5	0.9	3.5	61/57	21	59/68	87/87	27	1
CARIBBEAN	16	8	13	3.3	–	24	46/49	76/73	38	–
Antigua and Barbuda	0.04	0.02	0.03	2.4	48/–	–	–	–	–	–
Bahamas	0.1	0.1	0.1	2.5	–	–	–	–	–	–
Barbados	0.1	0.1	0.1	2.0	46/44	–	86/91	99/99	65	10
Cuba	5.0	2.7	3.0	1.8	–	30	70/75	96/95	38	23
Dominica	0.04	0.02	0.03	3.4	62/–	–	–	94/94	–	–
Dominican Republic	3.1	1.5	3.0	4.1	46/42	28	–	69/65	13	5
Grenada	0.1	0.03	0.05	2.9	–	–	–	98/98	–	–
Guadeloupe	0.2	0.1	0.1	2.6	44/36	4	–	–	55	–
Haiti	2.9	1.3	3.5	5.5	19/6	16	13/12	26/17	52	–
Jamaica	1.2	0.6	0.9	3.4	51/48	27	54/62	96/97	74	–
Martinique	0.2	0.1	0.1	2.4	51/39	3	–	–	54	–
Netherlands Antilles	0.1	0.1	0.1	2.9	–	–	–	93/92	–	–
Puerto Rico	1.7	0.9	1.1	2.7	69/63	16	–	90/87	31	–
St. Kitts-Nevis	0.02	0.01	0.01	3.6	–	–	–	–	–	–
Saint Lucia	0.1	0.03	0.1	4.2	43/–	–	–	81/82	–	–
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	0.1	0.03	0.04	4.0	55/–	–	–	96/96	–	–
Trinidad and Tobago	0.6	0.3	0.4	2.9	52/46	20	63/63	95/90	41	15
TROPICAL SOUTH AMERICA	112	56	110	4.2	48/–	17	37/40	79/75	29	–
Bolivia	3.1	1.4	4.3	6.3	26/11	17	37/31	76/51	23	2
Brazil	69.3	35.1	65.2	4.0	50/–	18	29/35	78/74	31	–
Colombia	14.7	7.5	13.1	3.6	49/39	15	45/51	86/84	27	–
Ecuador	4.4	2.0	5.2	5.0	40/33	19	56/56	78/70	21	4
Guyana	0.4	0.2	0.3	3.3	31/28	28	55/59	94/89	28	22
Paraguay	1.8	0.9	2.1	4.9	36/24	17	37/35	85/76	23	3
Peru	9.7	4.6	10.1	5.2	41/17	14	63/54	83/62	26	6
Suriname	0.2	0.1	0.2	4.1	–	–	46/51	68/63	–	–
Venezuela	8.7	4.3	9.3	4.1	49/38	20	41/38	80/73	31	5
TEMPERATE SOUTH AMERICA	23	11	17	3.1	–	–	55/63	93/91	31	3
Argentina	15.4	7.1	11.5	3.4	–	–	54/63	94/92	31	3
Chile	6.1	3.2	4.5	2.6	–	10	56/62	90/88	30	4
Uruguay	1.5	0.7	0.9	2.8	–	13	59/60	93/94	35	3
EUROPE	252	121	109	1.8	71/39	6	76/80	97/95	52	13
NORTHERN EUROPE	42	20	18	1.8	74/64	3	85/89	99/99	59	12
Denmark	2.6	1.3	1.0	1.4	76/71	1	106/105	99/99	73	27
Finland	2.5	1.3	1.0	1.7	77/60	2	92/104	99/99	72	31
Iceland	0.1	0.1	0.1	2.2	–	2	91/84	99/99	38	15
Ireland	1.8	0.8	1.5	3.0	60/14	3	90/101	98/98	37	8
Norway	2.1	1.0	0.9	1.7	71/64	2	92/98	99/99	66	26
Sweden	4.2	2.0	1.5	1.6	75/68	1	80/90	99/99	81	29
United Kingdom	28.8	13.7	11.9	1.8	75/66	4	82/85	99/99	54	5
WESTERN EUROPE	80	39	29	1.6	–	4	82/92	99/99	50	10
Austria	4.0	1.9	1.5	1.6	–	4	73/76	99/99	50	12
Belgium	5.0	2.4	1.9	1.6	81/46	7	94/94	99/99	37	9
France	28.0	13.4	12.4	1.8	79/53	5	77/93	99/99	53	5
Germany, West	31.8	15.6	9.6	1.3	–	3	47/53	99/99	51	11
Luxembourg	0.2	0.1	0.1	1.6	–	6	69/70	98/98	41	12
Netherlands	7.3	3.8	2.8	1.5	70/65	2	100/97	99/99	41	19
Switzerland	3.3	1.5	1.1	1.6	–	3	–	99/99	51	10
EASTERN EUROPE	57	27	29	2.1	69/19	9	64/71	99/97	65	27
Bulgaria	4.5	2.1	2.1	2.0	76/–	18	83/82	96/93	67	22
Czechoslovakia	7.9	3.7	4.0	2.1	66/30	8	34/58	99/99	73	28
Germany, East	8.8	4.2	3.4	1.8	–	5	–	99/99	51	32
Hungary	5.5	2.5	2.4	1.8	73/44	14	74/72	99/99	62	31
Poland	19.1	9.2	10.3	2.4	75/16	4	73/78	99/98	66	25
Romania	11.5	5.4	6.6	2.2	57/5	16	69/73	98/95	68	–
SOUTHERN EUROPE	73	35	33	1.9	66/26	8	78/77	94/87	41	7
Albania	1.5	0.7	1.3	3.6	–	–	71/61	–	59	–
Greece	5.1	2.4	2.6	2.1	–	11	88/79	93/76	35	4
Italy	29.3	14.0	11.6	1.6	78/33	7	73/72	98/96	40	7
Malta	0.2	0.1	0.1	2.1	–	–	80/72	86/82	22	–
Portugal	5.4	2.6	2.8	2.0	76/37	6	48/51	78/65	54	6
Spain	19.7	9.2	9.1	2.0	51/19	5	86/90	96/90	34	4
Yugoslavia	11.7	5.9	5.6	2.1	59/14	16	85/79	92/76	48	15
USSR	146	70	84	2.4	–	–	–	99/98	71	33
OCEANIA	12	6	8	2.7	–	7	71/71	86/85	53	8
Australia	7.9	4.0	4.2	1.9	67/46	7	88/91	99/99	53	10
Fiji	0.3	0.2	0.2	3.6	41/35	12	72/75	84/74	13	1
French Polynesia	0.1	0.04	0.1	3.9	–	–	–	–	–	–
New Caledonia	0.1	0.04	0.1	3.6	–	9	–	92/90	–	–
New Zealand	1.6	0.8	0.9	1.9	–	7	80/83	99/99	45	9
Papua-New Guinea	1.6	0.7	1.7	6.0	–	–	17/8	39/24	70	1
Samoa, Western	0.1	0.04	0.1	4.9	–	9	–	98/98	15	–
Solomon Islands	0.1	0.1	0.2	7.2	–	26	–	–	–	–
Vanuatu	0.1	0.03	0.1	6.0	–	–	–	–	–	–

The figures shown above are the latest available data or estimates. General sources are the Population Division of the United Nations, the UN *Demographic Yearbook*, the World Bank, the UNESCO *Statistical Yearbook*, the International Research Center of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the PRB *1985 World Population Data Sheet*, *Women . . . A World Survey* by Ruth Leger Sivard, national surveys and special studies. Contact PRB for specific data sources or clarifications. NOTES: The *total fertility rate* is the average number of children a woman would bear during her lifetime at current birth rates. *Contraceptive use* is measured for women in a marital or consensual union, ages 15-49. Modern methods are defined here as Pill, IUD, Sterilization, Condom, Diaphragm, Foam and other barrier or chemical methods. *Enrollment rates* are computed by dividing the number of secondary school students by the population in the applicable age group; since students may be older or younger than the normal age range, this rate can exceed 100 percent. To the extent possible, % *Women in National Legislatures* includes women in both elected and appointed government bodies.

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